

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend claims 1, 4 and 7, and add new claims 19-21 so that the claims read as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) A method of assembling an expandable absorbent garment comprising:

providing an absorbent composite having a length, opposite ends and opposite side regions, said absorbent composite comprising a backsheet, a topsheet and a retention portion disposed between said backsheet and said topsheet, wherein said backsheet comprises at least one fold formed along at least one of said opposite side regions, ~~wherein said retention portion comprises at least one fold formed along at least one of said opposite side regions, wherein said at least one fold of said retention portion is interfolded with said at least one fold of said backsheet,~~ wherein said absorbent composite is laterally expandable at least at said opposite ends thereof, wherein said at least one fold of each of said backsheet and ~~said retention portion~~ is unfoldable along at least said opposite ends of said absorbent composite;

providing a pair of front body panels having lateral inboard and outboard edges;

providing a pair of rear body panels having lateral inboard and outboard edges;

securing said inboard edges of said front body panels to said opposite side regions of said absorbent composite at one of said opposite ends of said absorbent composite; and

securing said inboard edges of said rear body panels to said opposite side regions of said absorbent composite at said other of said opposite ends of said absorbent composite.

2. (Original) The method of claim 1 further comprising securing said outboard edges of said front body panels to said outboard edges of said rear body panels on opposite sides of said absorbent composite respectively.

Claim 3 (Cancelled).

4. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 19 wherein said backsheet and said retention portion are each laterally expandable between at least a folded configuration, wherein said backsheet and said retention portion are interfolded, and an expanded configuration, wherein said backsheet and said retention portion are substantially flat, and wherein said absorbent composite has a first width when in said folded configuration and wherein said absorbent composite has a second width when in said expanded configuration.

5. (Original) The method of claim 4 wherein said opposite ends of said absorbent composite are capable of being independently, laterally expanded to said expanded configuration while at least an intermediate portion of said absorbent composite remains in said folded configuration.

6. (Original) The method of claim 4 wherein the difference between said second width and said first width divided by said first width is greater than 0.1.

7. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 19 wherein said topsheet comprises at least one fold interfolded with said back sheet and said retention portion.

8. (Original) The method of claim 1 further comprising providing an extensible cover disposed over said absorbent composite.

9. (Original) The method of claim 8 wherein said extensible cover provides an elongation of at least about 1 cm when subjected to a tensile force of 11.8 g/cm.

10. (Original) The method of claim 8 wherein said extensible cover provides a sustained deformation of at least about 20% when subjected to a tensile force of 19.70

g/cm and then allowed to relax, after removal of said tensile force, for a period of 1 minute.

11. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein said topsheet is extensible.

12. (Original) The method of claim 11 wherein said topsheet provides an elongation of at least about 1 cm when subjected to a tensile force of 11.8 g/cm.

13. (Original) The method of claim 11 wherein said topsheet provides a sustained deformation of at least about 20% when subjected to a tensile force of 19.70 g/cm and then allowed to relax, after removal of said tensile force, for a period of 1 minute.

14. (Original) The method of claim 1 further comprising providing an elastic member disposed along at least a portion of one of said opposite side regions of said absorbent composite.

15. (Original) The method of claim 1 further comprising providing a barrier layer disposed between said backsheet and said retention portion.

16. (Original) The method of claim 1 further comprising providing an elastic member connected to and extending laterally along the opposite ends of said absorbent composite.

17. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein said pairs of front and rear body panels are made of an elastic material.

18. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein each of said front and rear body panels extend laterally outward from said side regions of said opposite ends of said absorbent composite respectively.

19. (New) The method of claim 1 wherein said retention portion comprises at least one fold formed along of at least one of said opposite side regions, wherein said at least one fold of said retention portion is interfolded with said at least one fold of said backsheet.

20. (New) The method of claim 19 wherein said top sheet extends the entire length of said absorbent composite, and wherein said top sheet is not interfolded with said back sheet and said retention portion.

21. (New) The method of claim 7 wherein said top sheet defines an outermost surface of the absorbent garment on a bodyside surface thereof along at least a longitudinal axis centered between said opposite side regions, wherein said top sheet is configured to be directly exposed to a body of the user along an entire length of said top sheet along said longitudinal axis.